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ABSTRACT

In this position paper, the authors respond to the frequent criticisms and charges that values clarification is value free, relativistic, superficial, and without a cogent theoretical or research base. The authors first examine values clarification as theory. As originally developed by Raths, values education is a theory based on the thinking of John Dewey. Although not a complete theory, it does complement other partial theories of value and moral development, and it should not be seen as superficial. Some of the main elements of the theory are examined, including the methods and goals and the valuing process itself. Secondly, because of the nature of the valuing process, it cannot be assumed that values clarification is value free or relativistic. Students are continually encouraged to develop their values and certain kinds of choices are promoted over others. For example, critical thinking is preferred over noncritical thinking, and choosing freely is considered better than yielding passively to authority. Lastly, research and theory in the areas of moral reasoning are expanding, providing a growing body of theoretical and research data. Some of the available research is examined. On a final note, recommendations for the future of values clarification are discussed. (Author/JR)

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IN DEFENSE OF VALUES CLARIFICATION

A Position Paper

by

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Over the past few years, we have been alternately elated and distressed over the rapid rise in popularity which the values clarification approach has experienced throughout the United States and Canada.

The work that grew out of Louis Raths' theory of values clarification has, indeed, caught on. Our own publications on values clarification have sold an unexpectedly large number of copies and won several awards and honors. Our workshops and presentations have enjoyed a large attendance. We have been proud to learn of the fine writings and training efforts that many of our students and colleagues are doing, extending the work and improving it, in many areas of application.[1]

Simultaneously, the more people who are exposed to values clarification the more people there are who begin to teach the approach to others, sometimes in ways that do disservice to its goals or methods. And the more popular values clarification becomes, the more it is subject to criticism. Recently, some segments of the academic community have been vocal in their criticisms. Some of the more frequent charges are that values clarification is "value free," "relativistic," "superficial" and without cogent theoretical or research base.

As authors of the original and the most popular volumes on values clarification and as nationally active trainers and proponents of this approach, we wish to respond to these criticisms and developments and to make our position clear to critics and friends of values clarification alike.

Values Clarification As Theory

Values clarification is and always was a theory, originally developed by Raths (Raths, Harmin & Simon, 1966), based on the thinking of John Dewey. It has its language to describe the world of values and value development. It has a series of related hypotheses about the nature of human value development. It has a body of research that tests the hypotheses. It is not a complete theory, but this does not mean that what theory there is is "superficial." As we shall suggest, it very nicely complements other partial theories of value and moral development. Here are some of the main elements of the values clarification theory.

Confusion and Conflict

Values clarification begins with the observation that both individuals and societies are suffering from many ailments, not the least of which are value problems.

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1 For a list of materials currently available on values clarification, write: National Humanistic Education Center, Springfield Road, Upper Jay, New York 12987

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In individual lives, the symptoms are apathy, flightiness, over-conforming, over-dissenting and other behaviors indicative of lack of values or of value confusion. Ultimately, such confusion can lead to a lack of perceived purpose in individual lives--a state of confusion, anguish or suffering. Individual value problems also affect relationships and can contribute to considerable conflict within families and groups. Finally, individual value problems can lead to inefficiency and a reduction of constructive activity in society.

Society can ill afford such a loss. Nations across the globe suffer from similar value confusion--performing great acts of charity and construction with one hand and moral atrocities and environmental destruction with the other. The very survival of the planet is endangered by such value conflict.

The Method and the Goal

Values clarification is an intervention that attempts to change this state of affairs. It consists of a form of questioning (Raths, Harmin & Simon, 1966), a set of activities or "strategies" (Simon, Howe & Kirschenbaum, 1972) and an approach toward subject content (Harmin, Kirschenbaum & Simon, 1973), all of which are designed to help individuals learn a particular valuing process and to skillfully apply that process to value-laden areas and moral dilemmas in their lives. Use of the valuing process, in turn, helps individuals (and groups) develop and clarify their values in such a way that they are more likely to (1) experience positive value in their own lives and (2) act more constructively in the social context. This is values clarification in a nutshell. Now to elaborate.

The Valuing Process

As noted, the value clarifying interventions teach and facilitate the use of the valuing process. Raths (et al, 1966) originally described the process as having three dimensions--Choosing, Prizing and Acting--with a total of seven subprocesses. Kirschenbaum (1973) expanded the conception of the valuing process to include five dimensions--Thinking, Feeling, Choosing, Communicating and Acting--with at least seventeen subprocesses. The two conceptions are outlined below.

Thinking

1. On many levels (e.g., Bloom, 1956)
2. Critical thinking (e.g., Raths, 1967)
3. Divergent thinking (e.g. Parnes, 1967)
4. Moral reasoning (e.g., Kohlberg, 1968)

Prizing

1. Prizing and cherishing
2. Publicly affirming

Feeling

5. Being aware of one's feelings (e.g., Rogers, 1961)
6. Discharging distressful feelings (Jackins, 1965)
7. Experiencing positive self-concept (e.g., Combs, 1971)

Choosing

3. Considering alternatives
4. Considering consequences
5. Choosing freely

Choosing

8. Considering alternatives
9. Considering consequences
10. Choosing freely
11. "Achievement planning" (e.g., Alschuler, 1971)

12. Sending clear messages, including public affirmation (e.g., Gordon, 1970)
13. Empathic listening (e.g., Rogers, 1951; Gordon, 1975)
14. "No-lose" conflict resolution (e.g., Gordon, 1970)

Acting

6. Acting
7. Acting repeatedly, consistently

Acting

15. Repeatedly
16. Consistently
17. Skillfully, competently

Each conception of the valuing process has its advantages, which have been more fully explored elsewhere (Raths, et al, 1966; Kirschenbaum, 1973). However, both seem consistent with the dual goal of values clarification: that our living will have value for us and be socially constructive. Having outlined the processes, it is possible to further explain these two conditions.

As we see it, when our living has value for us, we prize and cherish more of our choices, beliefs and activities. We experience a stronger self-concept. We experience greater meaning in our lives. We are less apathetic and flighty, more purposeful and committed. This does not mean we are always "happy." It means that we are living vitally, experiencing the richness of ourselves, others and the world around us as we move toward self-selected, meaningful goals.

To be socially constructive, to us, is to act in a way that promotes the values of "life," "liberty" (i.e., freedom, justice and equality), and "the pursuit of happiness." Stated differently, to be socially constructive increases the likelihood that others will have lives that have value to them. This assertion brings us directly to the first of the criticisms of values clarification mentioned earlier.

Is Values Clarification "Value Free"? Is It "Relativistic"?

Raths' early work was, in part, a reaction to the heavy "moralizing, inculcating and indoctrination" which dominated values education before World War II and, in its extreme form, led to the horrors of the Nazi regime. In contrast, when discussing value-laden areas and controversial issues, the value clarifying teacher or parent accepts all viewpoints and does not try to impose his or her own views (although these may be "shared"). In that sense, the approach is "value free," and we can honestly say to parents that we are not trying to impose any set of values, but rather teach a valuing process. In that sense, it is also "relativistic." Responses are not judged as better or worse; each student's views are treated with equal respect.

But here the relativism stops. No matter what their viewpoint, all students are asked further clarifying questions. All are encouraged to keep developing their values through use of the valuing process. And it should be clear from the process that values clarification definitely promotes the value of choosing, prizing and acting, or if one prefers, thinking, feeling, choosing, communicating and acting. Moreover, it values certain types of thinking, feeling, choosing, communicating and acting. Thinking critically is regarded as better than thinking non-critically. Considering consequences is regarded as better than choosing impulsively or thoughtlessly. Choosing freely is considered better than yielding passively to authority or peer pressure. And so on.

We can go even a step further, and we probably have erred in not making this explicit often enough. Toward what end are these valuing processes better than their counterparts? Here, again, there are certain value judgments implicit in each process. If we urge critical thinking, then we value rationality. If we promote divergent thinking, then we value creativity. If we support moral reasoning as Kohlberg (1968) defines it, then we value justice. If we uphold free choice, then we value autonomy or freedom. If we encourage "no-lose" conflict resolution, then we value equality. Some of these values are "instrumental" values and others "terminal" values (Rokeach, 1973), as with the instrumental value of rationality being an instrument or means toward the terminal or end value of justice. The terminal values implicit in the valuing process are, again, life, liberty (freedom, justice and equality) and the pursuit of happiness. Called before the committee, we can only say that values clarification is not and never has been "value free."

Are There Any Absolutes?

Values clarification has also been called relativistic for neither affirming nor denying the existence of "absolute" values. This charge sometimes comes from the church and the cognitive developmental psychologists. Phrased differently, it might be asked: on what authority do we propose an educational approach which, as we saw above, has as its core the values of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? The Founding Fathers found "these truths to be self-evident." Can we go further? Can it be argued and proven that, on religious, philosophical or psychological grounds that these or any other values are absolute?

To the church, we must say, "We don't know." Many advocates of values clarification, clergy and laypeople alike, do believe that there are absolute values, that is, absolute truths about the universe or values which everyone should hold for reasons which transcend rationality. Other advocates of values clarification do not believe this. Values clarificaiton does not answer all questions of human existence, including the origin and design of the universe. It does attempt to describe a valuing process and say that if people use the process, they will experience more positive value in their living and will be more constructive in the social context.

Many cognitive developmentalists dealing with moral reasoning argue that, since their research indicates that Kohlberg's fifth and sixth stages of moral reasoning are the products of a sequential, irreversible, cross-cultural sequence of human development, therefore justice should be a universal value, maybe even the highest value. They disparage values clarification for not making an equally strong value assertion. However, the research proof is no proof at all for an absolute value. Physical disintegration and death are also sequential, more or less irreversible, and definitely cross-cultural; that does not prove that we should encourage the process. What the developmentalists have shown, and we agree that their work is important, is that if we surround people with certain conditions (e.g., moral reasoning at one level beyond their own), they will be likely to grow in predictable directions. Similarly, a physical educator might tell us that, if we provide the right conditions for children, we could have most persons running a five-minute mile. And the behaviorists have demonstrated that, if we provide the right conditions of reinforcement, we can get pigeons to play ping-pong. This does not mean that, ipso facto, all pigeons should play ping-pong, all people should run the five-minute mile, or all people should reason morally. The reason we think we should teach students how to reason morally is because we value justice. We can give lengthy reasons why we value justice, life, and so on, but we can't prove it. Nor can any research.

Does Values Clarification Have a Theoretical and Research Base?

If we consider values clarification based on Raths' seven processes, we find a growing body of data. The twelve early studies reported by Raths, Harmin and Simon (1966) and the nineteen more recent studies reported by Kirschenbaum (1975) represent tentative support for several of values clarification's hypotheses. New studies are frequently brought to our attention and we know of many in progress. The early interest in research on values clarifiction suffered a temporary lull, with the emphasis on improving the technique and classroom applications, but is now undergoing a renaissance, with quite a few studies using sophisticated designs and large populations. While the results are far from conclusive and the designs far from perfect, while we have much to learn, about eighty percent of the studies lend credibility to the assertion that use of the valuing process leads to greater personal value (e.g., less apathy, higher self-esteem, etc.) and greater social constructiveness (e.g., lower drug abuse, less disruptive classroom behavior, etc.). Superka's (1975) careful analysis of many different value education approaches and materials reached the same conclusion, although he was aware of only about half the research now available. He stated, "The research, although inconclusive, does provide some basis for the authors' claim that students who use values clarification become less apathetic, less flighty, less conforming as well as less over-dissenting (p. 97)."

If we view values clarification in the larger context as Kirschenbaum suggests, there is even greater research support for the approach. Each of the references on his list of valuing processes (p. 3) discuss theory and cite research suggesting that that particular process leads toward one or both of the goals of values clarification. For example, research in psychotherapy (e.g., Rogers & Dymond, 1954) indicates that as clients gain greater awareness of their own inner experience including what they truly prize and cherish, their self-esteem increases and they are less likely to repeat the destructive behavior which might have brought them into therapy. Maier's work (19) shows how the ability to entertain alternatives, to think creatively, and to negotiate no-lose solutions to problems leads to group decisions which are more productive from both the individual and group perspective. Kohlberg (1968) argues that the higher levels of moral reasoning are correlated with more moral behavior, e.g., less likely to walk by a person who is lying face down in a hallway and not stop and see if the person needs help.

Research and theory in the areas of moral reasoning, critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving, attitude change, self-concept, psychotherapy, achievement motivation, group dynamics, helping relationships, and skill training, to name a few areas, has burgeoned in the last few decades. We could make our point with many more examples--that much of the theory and research which exists to support any of these separate areas of study also supports the valuing processes included in values clarification. When we see values clarification not as an entirely separate system but as an approach that has much in common with other helping approaches, we realize that a large amount of theory and research is available, not only to lend support, but to help us understand how and why value clarifying methodology works.

The Future

Where does values clarification go from here? These are our hopes:

1. We will find better ways to help an increasingly large number of teachers, parents, and others learn the values clarification theory and methodology.

2. Trainers of values clarification will make every attempt to meet the "recommended qualifications for values clarification trainers" (available from the

National Humanistic Education Center, Upper Jay, New York).

3. We will continue to move in the direction of applying value clarifying methods to the study of school subjects, religious education, drug abuse education and other areas of application.

4. Research efforts in values clarification will continue, so that we may learn more about value confusion and clarity, the valuing process, and the effectiveness of our interventions.

5. We will be open to the discoveries of other approaches that touch on human growth and development, so that values clarification may be modified, integrated and otherwise improved.

In short, we would hope that values clarification and all the other approaches devoted to humanizing education will work together in an effort to better understand human growth and development and, upon this understanding, create better living and learning environments.

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